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## Tine De Moor's 'Silent Revolution'. Reconsidering her theoretical framework for explaining the emergence of institutions for the collective management of resources

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**Abstract:** Tine De Moor has developed a bold and robust scholarly framework for explaining the emergence of institutions for 'corporate collective action' in her 'Silent Revolution' article of 2008; the significance of which may serve to be the foundation of a research agenda on the commons for years to come. However, as revealed in this review piece, there are some fundamental flaws in the framework, which need to be ironed out first. There remains a problem with causality – in particular, no logical connection in the framework between the 'conditions necessary to make collective action possible' and the 'reasons to opt for collective action'. In summary, this review suggests De Moor's framework is an important step forward for those researching the commons, though it needs to be modified to become more receptive to the socio-political configurations that gave each pre-industrial society its character.

**Keywords:** Commons, De Moor, Silent Revolution, socio-political structures

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### 1. Introduction: pre-industrial responses to resources under pressure

Some resources such as peat or coal are finite: they can be extracted to extinction. Other resources are renewable but take a long time to be replenished, such as trees. Resources can also be irrecoverably ruined, for example, in the polluting of streams and rivers. That being so, pre-industrial societies reliant on these

resources for prosperity or mere subsistence had to manage them carefully. The problem was, however, that resources often came under pressure of being over-exploited, particularly in light of population pressure. To guard against over-exploitation, many pre-industrial societies all across Western Europe devised systems for the collective management of resources – often referred to as ‘the commons’. These commons took two basic forms (although there were numerous different subtle ways they could be arranged): they could represent cultivated arable land farmed collectively (the common fields), or they could represent a number of shared but rationed and regulated rights and obligations over resources such as pastures, forests, wastes, and marshes (De Moor et al. 2002, 18–19). Even water could be collectively shared (Gunawardana 1971, 16).

The emergence of the commons in Western Europe cannot be explained by merely highlighting increased pressure on limited resources, however. Although upward demographic trends may have been a general trend across most of Western Europe between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the commons did not appear everywhere here – far from it. Population pressure on resources may have stimulated the formalisation of institutions necessary for collective action in some areas, but other societies formulated alternative responses. Another tactic was to increase the basic amount of resources. Some societies decided to bring more land under productive use through reclamation. This included assarting of woodlands and wastes or the draining of wetlands in order to create new fields for arable or pastoral farming. Land was even ‘won’ back from the sea using networks of dikes, ditches, and mills (Squatriti 2000). Another way was to intensify production (essentially getting more out of the existing resources). This could be achieved through more intensive forms of husbandry and larger labour inputs, or it could be done through more intensive use of capital and reinvestment to support technological innovations such as wells, mills, dikes, and new ploughing or storage equipment (Boserup 1965; Campbell and Overton 1993, 95–99). Another tactic was to ease pressure on resources by simply adapting production – establishing new ventures to save dwindling resources. In medieval Holland, rural producers negated the effects of soil oxidation caused by peat cutting by turning towards proto-industries (van Zanden 1991, chp. 1; 2001; van Bavel 2003). In some cases the State could step in with protective legislation, as what happened in seventeenth-century Japan in the context of commercial pressures through a timber trade (Totman 1985, chp. 3.; 1998, chp. 3; Saito 2009).

Alternatively, resources could be protected and managed by instead focusing on the population side (reducing the numbers of people). Pre-industrial societies knew different methods of birth control (Biller 1982; Wolf and Engelen 2008). In pre-industrial society, this could be achieved through simply deciding to marry later, abstaining from sex, and extended breast feeding (Klemp and Weisdorf 2011, 7–13). Furthermore, immigration could be regulated and stopped (Wunder 1986, 46; Endres 1989, 87; Cohn 2007, 468–473), and some places even resorted to

infanticide (Kirch 1982). Of course, pre-industrial societies did not just stop at one method of managing resources under pressure – they often used a combination of methods; for example, in medieval Midland England population pressure between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries induced reclamation of new arable – yet it was cultivable land subject to common rights and which often became extensions of the common field system (Oosthuizen 2006).

## 2. The emergence of collective resource management in Western Europe: the De Moor explanatory framework described

Thus, the reasons behind the emergence of collective resource management in some parts of Western Europe in the pre-industrial period are not obvious. In a recent article, however, Tine de Moor has attempted to get to the bottom of the problem. Indeed, she has developed a bold scholarly framework for explaining the emergence of institutions for 'corporate collective action' (2008). In fact, her framework goes further than the simple traditional definition of 'the commons' offered above. Within the explanatory framework, she asserts that the emergence of a number of different institutions such as common fields and pastures, guilds, beguinages, and water boards, can be grouped together as bottom-up collective institutions which all emerged around an important defining period identified as the high Middle Ages and represented what she terms as a 'Silent Revolution' (De Moor 2011).

De Moor's model has three major facets, which taken together, can explain why formalised commons appeared in Western Europe from roughly the high Middle Ages onwards. First, there were the exogenous motors which pressurised natural resources; identified as 'population growth' and 'market development'. De Moor takes care to emphasize that population pressure and commercialisation were only outside stimulants for implementing collective institutions – the mere presence of these motors just taken on their own would not necessarily have been enough to encourage new bottom-up solutions such as the commons. That being so, in a second phase she offers a set of reasons for why pre-industrial societies may have opted for collective management of resources; identified as 'risk avoidance and sharing', 'advantages of scale', and 'transaction costs'.<sup>1</sup> These represent the incentives for employing collective action. Third and finally, De Moor offers a number of clear conditions that needed to be met if collective action was to happen; identified as a 'tolerant state', 'space for non-kinship-based relationships', and the 'legal recognition of alliances'. The outline of the framework is reconstructed below (Figure 1).

The appearance of De Moor's framework in a top international journal highlights the importance of her work, and the significance of which may serve to

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<sup>1</sup> Curiously, 'potential other advantages' were listed but these are not elucidated upon.

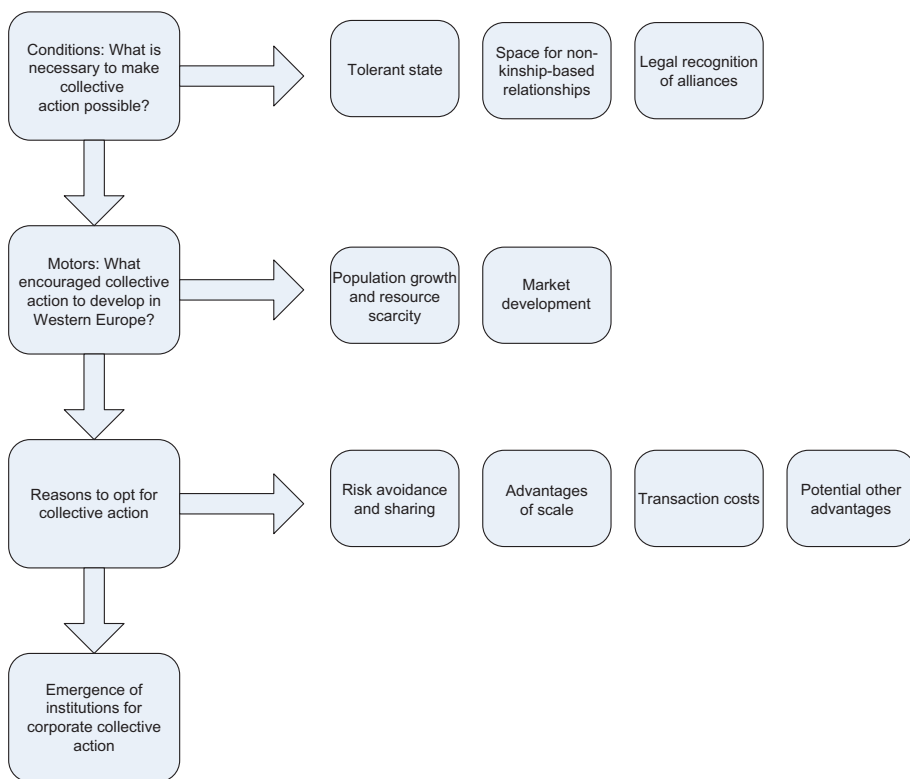


Figure 1: Motives, motors, and conditions for the emergence of institutions for corporate collective action (taken from De Moor, 'The Silent Revolution', 209).

be the foundation of a research agenda on the commons for years to come.<sup>2</sup> The intention of this short review paper, however, is to consider how convincing this framework really is. This is achieved by focusing in more detail on just one of De Moor's identified 'institutions for collective action' – the common fields and pastures.

### 3. Strengths and limitations of the De Moor explanatory framework

The reasons why societies opt for the commons as a form of resource management have been well discussed, both for the common fields and the imposition of common rights over the wastes. Risk avoidance and sharing, advantages of scale,

<sup>2</sup> In particular, see the European Research Council-funded project at [http://www.collective-action.info/\\_PRO\\_Main](http://www.collective-action.info/_PRO_Main).

and transaction costs (the reasons De Moor invoked) have commonly arisen in the literature. The common fields allowed for a more egalitarian division of land as every household's landholding was divided up into small morsels and scattered across the fields, while the community often lived in a concentrated village at the heart of these fields (Hoffmann 1975).<sup>3</sup> Often the strips were regularly distributed in the fields (Meibeyer 1972). Not only did this make transport and labour costs more equal, but it was also an exercise in risk-management as no single person could monopolise the best soils; if one harvest failed, this was not disastrous (McCloskey 1976; 1991; Dahlman 1980, 111–114; Fox 1984; Bailey 2010, 160). Furthermore, it allowed for collective regulation of the harvest and ensured orderly grazing on the stubbles (Ault 1972, 27–40; Vardi 1993, 1424–1427). Local people had the opportunity to band together into small groups to manage plough-teams and oxen were sometimes collectively acquired (often too expensive for one person) (Rösener 1985, 151). The common fields were often designed for sustainable ecological management as well, for they frequently allowed one of the fields (often one of three, but could be fewer or more) to spend time fallow, thus not exhausting the nutrients of the soil (Pretty 1990; Campbell 1995). With regard to common rights, this system helped balance population and resources by putting restrictions on grazing, limiting the felling of trees for private gain (Sommé 1990), and regulating water supplies and sources. Formal institutions such as forest courts were developed in order to examine infringements made on the commons (Hayhoe 2002, 52; Schütte 2004). As a result of this adaptive strategy, societies were better protected from the avaricious exploitation of resources by interest groups, which if unchecked, could have brought ruin to whole communities. In that sense, De Moor is right to highlight the importance of risk-sharing, advantages of scale, and transaction costs, as tangible reasons why societies would want to employ the commons.

Nonetheless, although there is much logic in De Moor's framework, there are some considerable shortcomings, in particular with the supposed conditions which made collective action possible. This short review piece first of all takes issue with the selection and rationale behind these conditions. The first problematic condition is that of 'tolerant states'. Tolerant states could encompass large geographical areas in the pre-industrial world. Yet within an area falling under state dominion, there could be a wide variety of societies pursuing very different methods of resource management. The commons were not employed in every society that fell under a particular tolerant state. For example, the colonising peasant farmers of medieval Holland had almost unprecedented freedoms and autonomy granted by the concessions offered by the Count of Holland or the Bishop of Utrecht (van Bavel 2010) – yet these societies chose not to use the commons as a method of resource exploitation. Indeed, these territorial lords did not even care about the

<sup>3</sup> However, it must be acknowledged that there was a wide variety of arrangements in the communal systems pertaining over medieval arable and pasture, not always conforming to a standard open-field and concentrated village structure.

type of agricultural exploitation undertaken in their newly colonised territories – they simply wanted a consistent flow of standard land rents (van der Linden 1956). The tolerance of the Count of Holland in the reclamation context led to extreme levels of freedom and flexibility in Holland rural society, but this did not convert to any move towards collective exploitation of resources. A number of other problems with the choice of this condition have been identified, which run counter to the historical evidence.

To take a first example, common management of resources existed from at least the eleventh century (probably earlier) all the way up to the eighteenth century in parts of Tuscany (Central Italy) which comprised the Florentine territorial state. Indeed, the commons were highly prevalent and resilient in the mountainous regions of northern and eastern Tuscany (Gualteri 1992, 60; Bicchierai 2007; Abatantuono 2004, 75–76; Licciardello and Scharf 2007; Zagnoni 2007). Signorial lords, ecclesiastical institutions, and village communities combined to regulate activities in the dense, ancient woodlands. Do we think that (particularly the late-medieval) Florentine State was tolerant towards the continual functioning of common-property systems within their territorial state? The answer is of course, no. Everywhere they could, they quashed existing peasant common rights, and wealthy urban burghers by the late Middle Ages were encroaching into the common lands and expropriating them from the rural producers (de la Roncière 1997; Balestracci 1999, 14–15; Malvolti 2003). The point is that the commons persisted in many parts of the Florentine territories, despite the fact that the Florentine government and the powerful mercantile and burgher interest groups who supported it, were not tolerant of common lands – and in fact were entirely antagonistic towards it. Indeed, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Florence did everything it could to act against the remaining signorial strongholds and their village communities (Waley 1988, 84–85; Osheim 2004, 166). In this case then, the commons emerged, were crystallised, and remained resilient in many parts of the Tuscany, despite the fact that the State had economic and political ambitions which did not fit with collective management of resources. More important for the emergence and success of the commons in Tuscany was instead the fact that the Florentine State failed to penetrate those areas characterised by common property systems, even though urban interests were antithetical to the commons (Curtis 2012). It was the resilience of rural societies rather than the objectives of higher overarching political powers that were more important here – it did not matter whether the State was tolerant or repressive.

This was not just a Florentine phenomenon; it happened elsewhere in Tuscany, for example in the *contado* of Siena (Isaacs 1979), but also further north in the city-states of the Po Valley (Panjek 1981; Chiappa Mauri 1985, 129; Menant 1993). Urban governments of various city-states all across the Po Valley and beyond were entirely antagonistic to the interests of rural communities which wanted to preserve their valuable common rights (Comino 1992; Grillo 2001; Rao 2005, 2006). Indeed, the right to hunt and fish in the marshes clashed with wealthy urban investors desire to reclaim more land and establish large commercialised tenant farms with complex hydrological innovations. On these commercialised

farms created through urban investment, see Sella (1987, 491); Dowd (1961, 148–149, 154); De Angelis Cappabianca (1988); Chittolini (1978); Occhipinti (1989). However, at the same time, some rural communities showed great resilience against outsider intolerance of their persistent collective exploitation of resources. One of the most famous cases is that of the commune of Nonantola, where villagers from the high Middle Ages right into the early modern period were able to defend and preserve their interest in the commons, in the face of firstly monastic and then urban political pressures (Cremonini 1987; Debbia 1992; Alfani 2011; Tagliapietra 2011). Particular rural societies were better placed to exploit and continue to defend their commons, regardless of political intolerance from above. Related examples can be found all across the Massif Central in Southern France where village communities in the late eighteenth century still stood in defiance and often appeared unaffected by the state's revolutionary legislation calling for dismantlement of the commons (Jones 1983; Vivier 1998, 164).

Rather than the emergence and longevity of the commons being highly dependent on the whims of tolerant or intolerant states, rural communities themselves determined the future of their resource-exploitation strategies – often based around political and power alignments made at the local level. For example, the communities of the Campine area of the South-Eastern Low Countries successfully implemented the commons over the long term, benefitting from their heterogeneity and demonstrating an even balance between all social groups – which prevented the commons from being manipulated by dominant forces or being dismantled altogether (De Keyzer 2012). An alignment of interests formed a protective shield. This situation could be contrasted with areas further north in the Low Countries such as in Overijssel, where the increased social and economic disparities at the local level between interest groups weakened the commons as an institution, and led by the seventeenth century to malfunction and eventual environmental degradation (Van Zanden 1999). The point put forward here then is that rural societies themselves dictated their path towards the commons (or not) – and certain societies were arranged in such a way that they could better stave off attacks and negative impact on collectively managed resources.

The second condition is equally problematic. De Moor uses the hypothesis put forward by Michael Mitterauer (2003) about the disappearance of family bonds and the European *Sonderweg* to argue that the emergence of the commons was linked to the amount of leeway available for the establishment of non-kinship-based relationships. Part of the problem here is that it is difficult to quantify or even formulate a reasonable definition of 'space for non-kinship-based relationships' – at least not how De Moor uses it in her article. If on the extreme end of the spectrum, this so-called 'space for non-kin relationships' refers to the establishment of the European Marriage Pattern (EMP), which began in the Middle Ages in North-Western Europe (De Moor and van Zanden 2010), this brings up some problems when considered in conjunction with the commons. It is quite clear that the commons of Western Europe were not confined to areas of North-West Europe, such as England or the Low Countries. Furthermore how can we square the emphasis on



the ‘space for non-kinship-based relationships’ with historical evidence which has shown that family structure and relations to former members of the common were necessary in some places for inclusion in the common (Hoppenbrouwers 2002)?

Other problems still occur when incorporating this condition into the framework for explaining the emergence of institutions for collective action. Indeed, the commons also appeared in areas of Western Europe, which apparently had less room for ‘non-kinship-based relationships’. For example, Southern Italy and Spain fall outside the Hajnal line used to demarcate the areas of Europe which employed all the characteristics of the late marriage pattern (1965). Yet it would be entirely wrong to suggest that these areas of Europe (perhaps typified by closer kinship networks) did not establish institutions for the collective management of resources. In fact, in Apulia (Southern Italy), the Royal Customhouse of Naples formalised the largest collectively-managed system of transhumant pasturing between the mountains of the Abruzzo and the plains of the Tavoliere, in the whole of Europe (Marino 1988; Nardella 1989)! Furthermore, this collectively-managed system of transhumant pasturing did not just begin in the late Middle Ages after formalisation, but had been exploited in some form since the Roman period (at least) (Nicolet 1977, 107; Lomas 1993, 122–123). Of course, the Tavoliere offered a very particular form of communal management of resources; combining local negotiation between Apulian farmers and Abruzzese shepherds with top-down management from the government in Naples. Perhaps De Moor’s framework did not include this type of communal arrangement, but we simply do not know because De Moor never mentions it, tending to focus on restricted areas of North-Western Europe, her geographical area of expertise. In any case, there is evidence for the collective management of land and resources in Sicily (Corrao 1988; Genuardi 1911) and Apulia (Bulgarelli 2011; Cascella 1991). In Spain, the *Mesta* was a large collective institution for grazing similar to the Royal Customhouse of Naples (Pastor de Togneri 1974), but other strong systems of commons emerged all over the Iberian Peninsula in Andalucía (Bernal Rodríguez 1997), Navarra (Arizkun Cela 1985), in the Asturias (Barreiro Mallón 1997), and Aragon (Pascua Echegaray 2011). Formalised commons also appeared east of the Hajnal line in areas now known as Romania (Panaitescu 1964) and the mountain regions of the Western Adriatic (Panjek 2011), to name but two examples. Again then, De Moor has invoked a necessary ‘condition’ for the emergence of the commons, which when explored a little further, becomes quite problematic.

The problem with using these kinds of conditions in a framework for explaining the emergence of the commons is that they are too macro and too vague. Neither the ‘tolerant state’ nor the ‘space for non-kinship-based relationships’ are conditions which can be invoked at the micro-level – at the level needed to understand the reasons why commons were employed in one society and in a neighbouring society were not. A tolerant state and a non-kinship-based set of social and economic relationships may have characterised, for example, large parts of the Low Countries during the late-medieval and early modern periods. This did not mean the commons were employed all over the Low Countries to



manage resources, or to the same extent (for the overview see De Moor et al. 2002).

#### 4. Critically amending the De Moor framework

Probably the greatest problem with De Moor's framework, however, is that there is absolutely no causal connection between her 'conditions' necessary to make collective action possible and her 'reasons' to opt for collective action. In order to create these causal connections, the framework needs to be modified to make it more receptive to the local or regional conditions that gave each pre-industrial society its character. The problem with the framework is that it is implicitly accepted that 'risk avoidance and sharing', 'advantages of scale', and '(lower) transaction costs' are all things that every pre-industrial society aimed to achieve or benefited from. This is a shaky assumption as explained in the passages below. **In fact, things like 'risk avoidance and sharing' were only beneficial for some societies.** Other societies were arranged in such a way that they did not care for or were not interested in the sharing of risks – in effect making collective management of resources less likely. The point being made here then is that the macro-conditions that De Moor used ('tolerant states' and 'non-kinship relations' – the choice of which has already been criticised in section three) should be replaced by a number of more regionally-specific conditions; the arrangement of which dictating whether or not the so-called 'reasons to opt for collective action' were actually beneficial to a particular society.

Some societies were more interested in 'risk avoidance and sharing' than others; indeed, more important for the emergence of the commons was not 'risk avoidance' per se but rather **the social distribution of risk**, in turn driven by local or regional constellations in property structure, access to and the arrangement of markets, and the diversity of economic portfolios. Those societies which had a large number of smallholding farmers or peasants would have been interested in any kind of resource management which reduced their susceptibility to going below the subsistence line. Indeed, if property was arranged in this way, these kinds of rural people benefited most from the risk avoidance strategies associated with, for example the common fields, because being smallholders, they were most susceptible to poor harvests and environmental disasters which could wipe them out. It is no coincidence that, for example in the Low Countries, the most dominant common-property systems appeared in areas with high numbers of small peasant farmers (see Stol 1991; Hoppenbrouwers 1993; van Zanden 1999; Tukker 2010; De Moor 2011; Kos 2011; De Keyzer 2012). Similarly, some societies were characterised by households engaged in wide and varied economic portfolios (employing a range of economic activities) so as to negate the effects of crisis in one sector. If the cultivation of grains failed, or the price of wool declined sharply, they could fall back on fishing, bee-keeping, or the timber trade, to name just a few examples (Hoffmann 1996). The risk-management ethos connected with the commons would have fitted well with societies engaged in

this type of exploitation. Further, collective management of resources may have interested those societies which had poor access to markets for commodities, or at least could not fall back on the market to save them in times of crisis due to taxes, tolls, and coercive signorial or urban monopolies stopping rural producers searching for the best price. In that sense, it can be clearly seen that certain sorts of constellations (in property structures, economic portfolios, arrangements of commodity markets) were more influential in pushing societies towards more collective management of resources.

‘Risk avoidance and sharing’ did not interest all societies though, and even if it did, collective management of resources was not necessarily the obvious option. For example, the smallholding farmers of medieval Holland were interested in reducing the risk to their harvests – particularly in light of the difficult ecological conditions they faced with poor drainage, the oxidisation of the soils, and flooding (de Boer 1978, 222; van Dam 2001). The commons had almost no role to play in the history of the Holland peatlands however. Instead, small farmers managed risks through private property ownership and favourable jurisdictions over the wastes. To reduce the risks of harvest failure and to equally distribute the different qualities of soils, each farmer cultivated a long narrow strip instead of the common fields – sometimes extending for kilometres in length (van der Linden 1956, 160–182; 1982; Henderikx 1989). Other pre-industrial societies around Lingnan and Guangdong in pre-industrial Southern China instead fell back on both State-, city- and gentry-funded granaries as a way of lowering the risks involved with unpredictable agriculture (Marks 1998, 229). In many parts of Inland Flanders, smallholding farmers did not collectively exploit resources as a way of limiting risk (although the commons did exist in certain places (see De Moor 2009)), but instead embarked on a ‘commercial-survival’ policy of highly labour intensive cultivation of tiny plots of cash crops to be sold in the large and close-by urban markets – effectively a way of dealing with the problems of extreme land fragmentation and population pressure (Thoen 1997, 2001; Thoen and Vanhaute 1999).

Elsewhere, some societies were simply arranged in such a way that ‘risk avoidance and sharing’ was a peripheral interest. For example, the large landlords who came to dominate landownership in Coastal Flanders by the late Middle Ages had little interest in sustainable management of resources or limiting risks – as evidenced by the decreased proportion of income devoted to water management structures. Large landlords who invested in new tracts of land here just accepted that if their acquired land was suddenly submerged by water (rendering it worthless), they could just reclaim new polders elsewhere (Soens 2011, 348–350). Similar philosophies can be seen elsewhere. In the highlands of the lower part of the Yangtze River (China), risk avoidance and sustainable management of resources was not considered. Instead peasants decided it was more in their interests to simply employ shifting cultivation methods using the ‘slash and burn’ technique (Osborne 1994). In the absence of clear or well-defined property rights in the woodlands, migratory peasants known as ‘shack people’ simply cut down

trees, intensively exploited their soil to ruination for short-term gain, and then moved on to new plots. Not only did the so-called 'shack people' not care for the sustainability of their own highland communities, but land reclamation and the erosion of the hillsides also endangered farms on the plains below – particularly in Hunan (Perdue 1987).

Furthermore, certain modes of exploitation and property structures did not support the kinds of risk avoidance that would be taken from collective management of resources. In those areas dominated by large landownership and early moves towards indirect exploitation and tenant farming (for example short-term leasehold), the risk-limitation benefits associated with the commons would have been non-sensical. Indeed, those areas which made an early switch to leasing often created a socially and economically polarised society which simply did not support the commons – large landowners and commercially-orientated farmers from the late Middle Ages onwards had no interest in supporting risk-averse peasant modes of exploitation such as the commons (van Bavel 1999, 2001; 274–278). Any small vestiges of common land were quickly usurped (Koch and Maris 1949, 193–194), and poor agriculturalists instead had to secure subsistence through wage labour on large farms instead. That is not to say commercialised farms and common field systems could not co-exist at all. Between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries in England, many commercially-orientated farmers operated alongside common fields and pastures (Allen 1992; Overton 1996). But the point is that these larger tenant or yeoman farmers were often antagonistic towards the common field system, but it was outside of their power to dismantle highly entrenched and resilient open field structures which had been persistent over a number of centuries already (perhaps encroachments, but no complete dismantlement). It was not until landownership became entirely polarised between large tenant or yeoman farmers and a group of landless agricultural proletarians that the real enclosure movement took off (Neeson 1996). Property structures and distribution were vital to the success and direction of the commons.

Similar problems exist when considering other 'reasons to opt for collective action', such as 'advantages of scale'. Relatively egalitarian societies of smallholding farmers and peasants certainly would have benefited from the collective pooling of resources and the collective investments made in the common. Indeed, one small peasant cultivator did not have the resources to acquire oxen or horses on his own, let alone a whole plough. Thus, by clubbing together and pooling their resources, small peasants were able to afford a plough, which in turn they pulled and operated together in teams, and which in turn fed into a system based around the collective management and cultivation of the fields (Rösener 1985, 151; Langdon 1986). This kind of situation was even more applicable in societies marked by poor or distorted access to credit and capital facilities – indeed rural credit did not permeate through to the medieval countryside of Western Europe in equal measure (Schofield and Lambrecht 2009; Zuijderduijn 2009). At the same time, in societies characterised by a

large proportion of their inhabitants with access to the modes of production, a wide section of the population had interests in collective investments which would directly benefit them such as drainage facilities and the fencing-off of pastures.

However, again, many pre-industrial societies were arranged in such a way that rendered the advantages of scale through collective investments obsolete. Indeed, by the time of the so-called formalisation of institutions for collective action (i.e. the high Middle Ages in De Moor's or Avner Greif's view (Greif 2006) (for timing, also see Reynolds 1997 and Blickle 1998)), societies had become increasingly stratified. The relationship between cities and towns and their rural hinterlands had grown stronger in many parts of Western Europe, and urban capital and investment flooded into the countryside (Epstein 2001, 4–9). Through the process of urban expropriation of rural producers' land, many of the investments that in peasant-dominated areas may have been made through the commons were instead made by wealthy urban investors – restructuring the landscape and rearranging it into enclosures, and laying down new water management features. In certain contexts such as the central sharecropping areas of Tuscany, all capital investments in animals, water management, boundaries, and equipment were made by the landlords themselves on behalf of their subordinate tenants (Emigh 1996). Similarly with regard to the modes of production, if all the resources were in the hands of a few interest groups in a society, few people had an interest in the fate of the resources (i.e. not interested in maintaining them over the long-term being divorced from the production process), a situation not favourable to collective management. This is a similar argument used in the declining commitment to water management structures (Soens 2006a; 2006b; 2011; van Tielhof 2009; van Dam 2009). In Northern Italy, economic polarisation and rural-urban migration in fact led to the complete unravelling of important collective systems for managing water resources through village communities (Curtis and Campopiano 2012).

## 5. Conclusion

De Moor has done much to alter substantially the ways we approach and think about the emergence of corporate collective action in Western Europe. In particular, the clear separation of motors, reasons, and conditions in the framework is something to be applauded. It has most of all forced home the notion that demographic and commercial pressures did not dictate how societies from the past chose to manage their resources. They were only motors or stimulants. Not just in reference to her 'Silent Revolution' article, but her publications taken as a whole have also done much to show that (given the right conditions) institutions for collective action were not static, cumbersome, or bound for failure, but actually a preferential option chosen by many people within pre-industrial Europe (De Moor 2012). The old 'Tragedy of the Commons' mantra (Hardin 1968) has finally been quashed.

There are problems with the framework that De Moor has adopted for explaining the emergence of the commons in Western Europe from the high

Middle Ages, however, which can be addressed on two levels. First, the choice of 'favourable conditions', as explained in section three, has many flaws. Essentially they are too macro. A tolerant state and a non-kinship-based set of social and economic relationships may have characterised large parts of the pre-industrial Low Countries, to use just one example. This did not mean the commons were employed all over the Low Countries to manage resources, or to the same degree.

Second and more importantly, there is no causal link created between De Moor's 'conditions' and her 'reasons' for why collective management of resources emerged; indeed, we are given almost no information on the mechanisms linking her variables, in that respect reducing the framework to a mere list of factors. As mentioned already, this can be put down to the implicit assumption in the explanatory framework that her 'reasons to opt for collective action' were things every pre-industrial society would benefit from. This appears to be false, since the social distribution of risk differed greatly between societies. The way the De Moor framework can be improved is by making it more receptive to the variety of local and regional constellations which distinguish one pre-industrial society from another. By replacing the very vague and ultimately problematic 'conditions' De Moor suggested such as 'tolerant states' and 'non-kin-based relationships' with an array of power and property structures, modes of exploitation, economic portfolios, factor markets and markets for commodities, we might come closer to understanding why the commons came to be used in some societies of Western Europe but not in societies elsewhere. In that way, the motors, conditions, and motives that De Moor referred to in her article become more closely and logically connected to each other: adding these local and regional constellations to the De Moor framework increases its explanatory power. Essentially the key point that this article puts forward, is that we need to move away from implicitly accepting the benefits of market-, state-, or commons-based solutions to resources problems, but accept that different resource-management strategies suited different societies, according to their inherent characteristics. While the risk-limitation feature of the commons may have benefited a set of communities in one part of Western Europe, in another part of Western Europe, risk-limitation was not high on the agenda, making the commons unsuitable.

Accordingly, a useful future direction to take the framework may be to compare these regional configurations which made the collective management of resources more of a feasible and beneficial option to certain pre-industrial societies with other areas of Western Europe which took alternative routes towards easing demographic or commercial pressure on their resources – for example, in intensification of production, land reclamation, or diversification of economic portfolios. In that sense, unlocking some of the mystery as to why the commons emerged in certain parts of Western Europe may actually be achieved by taking a step back from the commons. Perhaps the question posed should be as follows; if the commons had so many benefits to pre-industrial societies (as De Moor and other authors repeatedly assert – see positivist interpretations in the recent

Rodgers et al. 2011; Poteete et al. 2010) – why did so many societies choose **not** to employ collective management of resources?

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